

## A PART OF A GHOST

## A MYSTERY

Now I do not believe in 'ghosts'—*i.e.* generally—I do not credit all the stories I have read or heard concerning the appearances visible, if not tangible, of the departed, nor, indeed, the great majority of those tales I have listened to in times gone by; but I do not feel called upon to affirm that all such exhibitions of *revenants* are impossible, nor do I take it upon myself to declare that I have no faith in 'fairies,' and to deny that they can be and have been seen on occasion in suitable places. The accounts in works of high authority of the doings of warlocks and witches are received by me with a respect the nature and depth of which I do not care to analyse. The web of that stuff of 'which dreams are made' furnishes abundant material for the poet, the dramatist, and the novelist to this day. In the literature of every people there is evidence of the belief, universal in the early ages of the world, in the existence of spirits, good and bad, in supernatural visitations and influences, and in the agencies of elves, goblins, djins, aërets, and the like on the every day—and night—affairs of men's lives and fortunes. These agents cannot be called 'beings'; if they be 'creatures,' it would be difficult to determine how or why they were created. Some of them were powers of the air, of the water—Ariels or Undines, who could use physical force to effect their ends when they pleased. Who can draw the frontier lines of the kingdom of the lemures—the inhabitants of the land of nightmares—or determine the borders of the shadowy realms whence came the ghosts who 'squeaked and gibbered in the Roman streets' ere Caesar fell, the visions which spoke most audibly as they passed in dreadful procession before the agonised Richard in his tent on Bosworth field? At all events I shall not attempt to do so; I only mention some of them to point out that when they did appear it was in their *entirety*. They did not throw off fragments! or dislocate their limbs—like the skeletons in the '*danse Macabre*' at Maskelyne and Cook's.

Now my story relates to a part of a spirit or of a ghost, if there be a difference between the two, and I shall at once proceed to tell it, and to leave it to you, my readers, to form your own opinion concerning the mystery. Some thirty years ago a friend of mine, still

alive and pretty hale and hearty, was paying a round of visits on the east coast far north in the Highlands. It so happened that he was detained on his way to the house of one of his friends by an accident to his carriage, which compelled him to leave his servant and luggage behind him, and to continue his journey in the 'machine' of the country inn over a very bad road, so that he arrived at his destination late at night, to the discomfort of his host, who, not expecting him when dinner time had passed, had invited a neighbouring squire to occupy the room that had been reserved for the visitor, 'and he turned in before you arrived to-night, so I must ask you, my dear fellow, to put up with a makeshift in a spare room, which we are making as comfortable as we can. It is a little high up, though for a man who has been up Mont Blanc that does not matter I hope, eh? But there are some other little drawbacks. The clock in the turret above makes a confounded clicking! There is no bell in the room; but if your man does not turn up I will send my valet to you early, and we will rig you up for the deer drive all right in the morning.'

After supper, and a short adjournment to the billiard room for a pipe, my friend gladly accepted the proposal of his host to show him his room. It was, indeed, very high up—for the castle was one of the old keep-like buildings, dating from the fifteenth century, which are not uncommon in the Highlands and on the Borders. The laird led the way. Corridor and staircase were traversed and mounted till a corkscrew flight led to a narrow landing, which was lighted up by the blazing fire in the bedroom, of which the door stood open to give a warm welcome to the stranger.

'Here we are! You will find everything ready for you—papers and letters that arrived by last post this evening. Pleasant dreams and good night!' And now I will let my friend tell what happened.

When my host left me, he said, I had a look all round. 'Decidedly better than camping out in any tent I know of.' It was a square low room, tapestried all round. One side was occupied by a grand old four-poster with heavy curtains; a large chest of drawers and dressing table were opposite; two old-fashioned arm-chairs, and the letters and papers of which the laird spoke were spread out on the table; night dress and slippers before the fire—all very snug and bright. The tapestry on the walls was faded and stained, but it was entire, and it had evidently been transferred from some other room to cover the nakedness of the stone walls, which it had been cut to fit. I could make nothing of the subjects—naked mostly—Diana and Actæon perhaps—or Bacchus and Ariadne—or it might be Adam and Eve. A horrible creaking and grating noise up the chimney was, it seemed, the preliminary of the beat of the clock, which in a querulous, wheezy fashion struck twelve o'clock. I looked over my letters—nothing important—undressed and tumbled into bed. It was delightfully soft, and the sheets were cool and sweet. I was tired and I was